



Apostle Islands News Release

Release date: Immediate

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Date: February 17, 2004

Apostle Islands NL Clarifies Position on Snowmobiles and Other Motorized Vehicles

- Motor boats are permitted, and will remain so even if wilderness is designated
- Park will work towards authorizing snowmobiles on the ice within ¼-mile boundary
- Jet skis, float planes remain unauthorized

The National Park Service (NPS) is clarifying its policies regarding transportation within Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. A variety of local and national issues have led to confusion about which forms of transportation are legal within the park. According to Apostle Islands National Lakeshore superintendent Bob Krumenaker, motor boats will continue to be permitted in the park, even if wilderness were to be designated by Congress in future years. Snowmobiles, off-road vehicles, jet skis, and float planes are currently illegal in the park, but park staff have recently committed to seeking a special regulation authorizing the use of snowmobiles and off-road vehicles on the frozen surface of Lake Superior.

Due to the park's complex boundary, however, all of these vehicles can be used in most of the open waters - or frozen surfaces - between the islands. The park's boundary extends only a quarter-mile out from any shoreline, so roughly 90% of the water within the island chain is outside of the jurisdiction of the NPS. On the map below, the narrow yellow bands represent those parts of Lake Superior contained within the park. Areas in blue are outside of the park, so park rules do not apply.

During the course of the park's Wilderness Study, employees have listened to hundreds of boaters who have expressed concern that wilderness designation for parts of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore might lead to a ban on motor boats in the future. To prevent this from happening, the NPS made sure that none of Lake Superior was included in *any* of the alternatives being studied. Motor boats would still be allowed in the park because none of the lake would be within the wilderness boundary. The park boundary and the wilderness boundary do not have to be – indeed will *not* be – identical. Wilderness would be limited only to certain land surfaces, and never the lake.

“We got the message loud and clear,” says Superintendent Krumenaker. “Our visitors do not want to see changes made in boating patterns or practices. They can rest assured there will be none, whether Congress designates wilderness here or not. Everyone will still be able to beach their boats, use public docks, and anchor off the islands. The lake will not be part of the wilderness.”

Recent lawsuits and court rulings involving the NPS have led to a rather confused situation regarding the use of snowmobiles and off-road vehicles on the frozen surfaces of Lake Superior, however. These vehicles, which have always been illegal on most of the park's land surfaces, were legal on the ice within the park prior to the mid-1980s. But national regulations changed in 1987, and now their use can be legal only if the NPS pursues a special regulation specific to Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The NPS has been sued over the lax enforcement of the bans on snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, and now the agency must faithfully enforce the law.

“We have been reluctant to enforce it in the past due to safety reasons,” Krumenaker says. “Ice fishermen frequently hug the islands since that is often where the safest ice is. But the legal controversy over snowmobile use in Yellowstone and other NPS areas leaves us no choice. We want to avoid a court-ordered enforcement which would seriously reduce the amount of discretion we can apply.”

The NPS recognizes that nothing is gained by banning these vehicles in the narrow quarter-mile band of water around each island. Apostle Islands National Lakeshore staff are committed to pursuing special regulations that will once again authorize snowmobiles and other off-road vehicles on the frozen surface of the lake within the quarter-mile boundary. This is a difficult and time-consuming process that may take several years, but the park's goal is to secure these regulations as quickly as possible and pursue other legal means to allow these uses in the interim.

“Many people have asked us what they can do to help with the special regulations for snowmobiles and off-road vehicles,” says Krumenaker. “We really appreciate their desire to help. Right now, the best way to help out is through voluntary compliance with our current enforcement efforts. Snowmobilers just need to stay a quarter-mile away from the islands. You can still fish and recreate within the quarter-mile boundary, but the snowmobiles need to stay outside. And remember, obtaining the new regulations that will reauthorize their use on the ice is a public process. We need concerned citizens to be involved, and when the issue is open for public comment, we need to hear from you.”

All of the blue areas on the enclosed park map remain open to snowmobile and ORV use, since they are outside of the park's boundaries. The NPS urges the public to exercise extreme caution when traveling on the frozen surface of Lake Superior. The ice is often rough and conditions can go from safe to dangerous without notice.

National regulations prevent the use of jet skis and float planes within the boundaries of the park. Park staff presume that this will remain the case indefinitely. As with snowmobiles and ORVs, this applies only to waters within the park's quarter-mile boundary.

"We understand these issues are complex, and we apologize for any inconveniences that our visitors might be experiencing," Krumenaker says. "We remain absolutely committed to allowing the continued use of power boats in the future, and to legalizing motorized access to the ice in the winter as quickly as we can. I encourage anyone with questions to contact Chief Law Enforcement Officer Greg Zeman at 715-779-3398, extension 201."

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